

Fare hike called 'a small Band-Aid on a big problem'

Changes will bring in an extra \$50-million, but cover less than half an estimated shortfall for 2010

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The Toronto Transit Commission passed a slate of fare increases yesterday, while vowing to review a funding model so broken that staff say they may have to impose similar fare hikes for the next several years just to cover operating costs.

The new fares, which come into effect Jan. 3, slap an extra 25 cents on the price of a single ride, now \$2.75 for cash payment, and raise adult monthly Metropasses from \$109 to \$121.

University and college students got a break, as the rate for monthly passes for seniors and high-school students, which will cost \$99 when the changes come into effect, was extended to postsecondary students.

The changes will bring in an extra \$50-million for the TTC next year, but will cover less than half an estimated \$106-million funding shortfall for 2010. The commission still doesn't know where the extra \$56-million will come from, as the city struggles with a budget shortfall that could be as much as \$500-million.

Premier Dalton McGuinty said at a news conference yesterday that the province, which faces a \$24.7-billion deficit, won't be bailing out Toronto's transit system.

TTC Chairman Adam Giambrone said he's opposed to service cuts, but said they'll be looking for "efficiencies" in operations in an attempt to close the funding gap.

"We're in discussion with the city budget committee," he said. "I'm optimistic that there won't be any cuts to service."

The commission also made a commitment to negotiate with provincial and federal governments to sort out long-term funding for the city's transit system - funding that allows for a five-year forecast of expected fare increases and only obliges users to pay for 60 per cent of operating costs. Now, TTC riders pay close to 68 per cent of the public service.

The fare hikes passed yesterday are "a small Band-Aid on a big problem," said Katrina Miller, campaigns director for the Toronto Environmental Alliance.

"Year after year, the TTC faces a budget crisis. ... We need to know how much riders are going to pay, whether the province is going to make a long-term commitment and whether the service is going to improve."

The vote was a victory for the Canadian Federation of Students, which has been campaigning for postsecondary student breaks.

"This is a good first step," said Hamid Osman, a spokesman for the organization's Ontario chapter.

"It doesn't matter if you're a high-school student, a university student or a college student. You're still a student and there should be one fare that students pay."

Comparable costs

If there's one thing everyone could agree on yesterday, it's that Toronto commuters are being taken for a ride: They pay a higher proportion of transit operating costs - 68 per cent - than almost any other comparable city in North America.

Vancouver

Transit riders cover 55 per cent of the cost of their bus ride. The rest is covered by revenue sources including the provincial gas tax, a portion of municipal property taxes and parking fees. Users pay more if they travel between zones. Montreal

The Société de Transport de Montréal has an 83-cent subsidy for each rider, compared to a 59-cent subsidy per Toronto user. The transit system gets more than \$100-million in provincial funding annually.

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